

Who Can Be a Key User?

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This short eBook is part of the book End User Heroes

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Introduction

In the middle of the pandemic-induced lockdown of mid-2020, a young intern hosted a virtual session on End-User Computing.

The topic: *How involving end-users in digital transformation projects can enhance project success*. The audience was diverse and global, including Software Designers, Developers, Business Analysts, and Business Managers, each bringing their curiosity, frustrations, and aspirations to the discussion. Despite the technical nature of the subject, the intern captured the audience's imagination. Speaking without jargon, and grounded in real-world scenarios, the session sparked active conversation. What began as a knowledge-sharing session turned into a spirited debate.

"Users are the problem," one developer said. "They bypass workflows."

"They resist change and delay adoption," another added.

A business analyst cited how even large e-commerce platforms suffer losses when internal users ignore established processes.

The comments poured in. Examples of project delays, compliance breaches, rework, and even revenue losses, all traced back to user behavior. And yet, beneath the frustration, a deeper question emerged.

Were users truly the saboteurs of innovation? Or is there a deeper disconnect at play?

What the Designers Miss

As the discussion unfolded, the truth came into focus. Software designers and developers, despite their technical brilliance, sometimes overlook a critical element viz. Viewing from the End-user's perspective.

Ironically, designers and developers are End-users themselves. Think of the tools they use daily, from code repositories to e-commerce apps. Yet, when building solutions for others, there's a subtle but critical shift in mindset. Their focus moves from *how people work* to *how systems should work*. And in that shift, the user often disappears from their view.

Bridging the Gap: The Role of Key Users

This book explores the gap.

Not to assign blame, but to foster understanding. It highlights the often-overlooked role of **Key Users** or **power users**; those who operate at the intersection of business operations and technical execution. Key Users are the domain experts who bring systems to life, advocate for usability, and often rescue projects from failure through their ground-level insight.

Through real-life anecdotes, practical templates, historical insights, and proven frameworks, *End-user Heroes* offers a lens into the world of those who make or break digital transformation projects

Who Is This Book For?

- A. Software Designers and Developers**, who want their solutions adopted by the users.
- B. Business Analysts**, who design workflows and logic.
- C. UX/UI Designers** who seek empathy-driven design.
- D. ERP Implementers and Project managers** who know that go-lives succeed only when users embrace the system.

Why This Book Matters?

Digital transformation is not just about the tools we build. It is about the people who use them. Success doesn't lie in the features or frameworks alone; it lies in whether people trust, adopt, and grow with the systems. This book is a tribute to the End-users, the champions, the skeptics, the workaround experts, the spreadsheet lovers, and the change-resisters, as within their stories lies the key to truly meaningful technology.

Welcome to the *End-user Heroes*.

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Chapter 2 - Who Can Be Key Users?

Key Users are the ones who mimic all other Users

Enterprises need a new strategic vision to thrive in the digital age; the stakes are increasing to define and deliver new value by leveraging technology. The CEO and the Executive team leaders are reeling with the challenges of identifying and implementing digital-enabled business models. They are wrestling with making smart capital investments to develop and mature organizational capabilities, to enable agility and to respond rapidly to new market opportunities. Two key factors in transformation through technology are automation and innovation. While Technology may solve business challenges, it may also be a source of new business challenges.

Organizations hire external IT solution providers who can facilitate them to ensure effective deployment of technology. External consultants have a limitation in that the internal functional users may not consider them as their leaders, especially the veterans who had been experts in their field for years. We need internal representatives who are functionally strong as well as can become Technology literate quickly. Technology handicap is the headwind that constrains functional users. Techno-literacy is the tailwind that empowers functional users to scale to new heights. An illiterate of the 21st century is one who cannot unlearn, learn and relearn.

End-user Heroes play the role of spreading Techno-literacy to all the staff. If engaged properly, they can rally the entire organization towards accelerating digital transformation. Their domain skills and expertise empower them to show outcomes early, define or redefine objectives and ensure effective deployment. End-user heroes are catalysts for digital transformation.

* * *

In any digital technology implementation, the Key Users or Power Users, our “End-user Heroes”, play a crucial role. A well-defined job description is essential to identify and empower them effectively. While Key Users may be engaged part-time or full-time on a project, it's vital to remember that they are from functional teams and serve as ambassadors from their function to the technology implementers.

What are the Activities of Key Users?

Key Users typically engage in:

- A) Concept design workshops
- B) Specification document preparation, review and sign-off

- C) System testing
- D) Regular meetings with project stakeholders
- E) Training sessions
- F) Process walkthroughs and workshops

Depending on the project's scale and complexity, Key Users may be required to dedicate themselves full-time or part-time to the implementation effort.

What Makes an Ideal Key User?

The ideal Key User combines deep professional expertise with a robust understanding of business processes, both within their domain and in related areas. They should possess an affinity for digital technologies and a natural ability to work well with people. While these attributes may also describe managers, such as department heads, it's important to note that managers may lack hands-on familiarity with transactional details. A Key User could be in a managerial role but must bring a nuanced, process-oriented perspective to the table. Selection should be driven by the demands of the digital initiative, not by the organizational chart.

Technical Requirements:

- a) Process Expertise: Deep familiarity with tasks and activities end-to-end in their function.
- b) Tenure: Ideally employed within the organization long enough to understand its nuances.
- c) Peer Respect: Colleagues of the Key User must recognize him/her as a knowledge expert; The 'End-user Hero'. A lack of expertise can derail progress.

Example:

A Key User for the "Accounts Payable" process must know the entire "Source-to-Pay" workflow. Someone solely focused on data entry or claims processing may lack the breadth needed. The best candidates think holistically and are curious about process optimization.

Personality Requirements:

Besides technical competence, the Key User should show:

- 1) Interpersonal Skills - Able to collaborate across functions and bridge gaps between technical and business teams.
- 2) Inquisitiveness - Eager to learn and show enthusiasm about adopting new systems.
- 3) Creativity - Long to suggest innovative ideas and explore the Art of the Possible.
- 4) Energy - Bring speed and vitality to the project.

- 5) Confidence - Capable of presenting viewpoints clearly and persuasively to both project leaders and functional heads.
- 6) Training Ability - Skilled in coaching peers, juniors, and even senior colleagues.
- 7) Resilience in Ambiguity - Comfortable navigating uncertain scenarios and remaining focused.
- 8) Diplomacy - Emotionally balanced and adept at resolving conflicts without personalizing issues.
- 9) Project Management Awareness – While certification isn't mandatory, familiarity with structured project management methodologies would be an advantage.
- 10) Cross-Cultural Skills – For global organizations, multilingual and cross-cultural competencies add significant value.

* * *

Importance of Selecting the Right Key Users – Case Study

Key Users must have a high probability of success in their roles. This is not negotiable.

I recall an ERP implementation project where one functional team made a critical error. They assigned a person to the Key User role simply because they couldn't accommodate him elsewhere in their department. Unfortunately, this individual lacked both the required competence and behavioral maturity. While other functions deployed their top talent for their respective modules, this function became a weak link. As the project progressed, all Key Users formed a dedicated group that met daily to tackle cross-modular challenges and co-create solutions. The group often found unresolved issues traced back to the module handled by the underperforming Key User. Delayed tasks completed with inaccuracies caused a ripple effect across other modules. Tensions mounted, and despite repeated escalations, the functional management failed to provide a replacement.

As the go-live deadline approached, the implementers moved the module relating to that function's operations to production in its flawed state. Post go-live, the flood of support calls confirmed their worst fears. The situation became so untenable that the entire module required reimplementation six months later, incurring significant additional costs and effort. Ironically, the same Key User went around proclaiming that the ERP system had failed and was unsuitable for their function, damaging the reputation of the project and sowing distrust across the organization.

This story is not unique. Almost every automation or digital transformation project has its own horror stories. Every implementation disrupts someone's workflow; whether it's a storekeeper, accountant, system administrator, salesperson, CXO, or even Board members. People react in different ways: some accept and adapt, some struggle and remain silent, and others, the true game-changers, find new ways to work smarter. These smart adapters are the true End-user Heroes, our ideal Key Users.

* * *

The DNA of a Key User

End-user Heroes possess a rare ability to challenge the status quo. They don't accept systems or processes just because "that's how it's always been done" or because they delivered results in the past. These individuals are:

- A) Energetic and eager to learn.
- B) Willing to push their limits when facing challenges.
- C) Always look for quick wins and iterative improvements.
- D) Unafraid to ask questions, gather insights, and form new hypotheses to test.

They align seamlessly across people, processes, and technology. End-user Heroes stay ahead of change - proactively generating breakthrough ideas, instituting new methods, and rigorously evaluating outcomes. They are continuous learners, staying updated not just in their functional areas but also in the enabling technologies.

While they are typically friendly, supportive, and collaborative, cheering on others' successes, they also sometimes guard certain specialized skills closely. This tendency, while occasionally misinterpreted, reflects their deep-seated expertise. Beyond the written rules, policies and standard operating procedures, these heroes carry instinctive or tacit knowledge that allows them to go further and faster than most. If harnessed wisely, this knowledge propels both them and the organization to new heights. Mishandled, it can create friction or unintended setbacks.

Where Are They Now?

In organizations that have already rolled out ERP or other large-scale systems, End-user Heroes likely played key roles during initial implementations and may still support these systems from within their departments. They often maintain close ties with departmental senior management, though they may not always rise to senior roles unless they also build deep functional and managerial expertise.

Typically, management chooses Key-users for specific projects that create new paradigms within their function. Over time, many Key-users migrate across departments or into technology-focused roles; sometimes even joining the CIO's office if they deepen their technical skills.

Fresh Blood, Fresh Perspectives

If it's been several years since the last ERP implementation, it's often wise to seek new Key Users for the digital transformation initiatives. While experienced hands offer valuable historical knowledge, new Key Users bring fresh perspectives and unencumbered thinking from the functional side.

Ideally, the chosen Key User should be someone who has spent considerable time within the function and the organization. A new joiner, no matter how talented, may lack the organizational influence and contextual insight needed to be truly effective.

* * *

Can we train someone to become a Key User?

The answer is neither a firm yes nor an outright no. It sits somewhere in between. While selecting Key Users, we may have to compromise on certain minimum skill requirements. We may not always find the perfect fit, especially in terms of technology awareness, but we must be rigorous for behavioral competencies.

Key Users often may come across the proposed Digital technologies for the first time. Ideally, they should be involved right from the evaluation stage of the project, allowing them to familiarize themselves early with the standard functionalities of the new technology. As soon as the implementation team is onboard, Key Users should undergo specialized training delivered by the implementation partner. This training will cover the basics and go into detail about specific features, helping key users teach others.

What Should Key User Training Include?

A. Training for Minimum Skills

Introduce the “Art of Possibilities” to understand what the new digital systems can achieve, including their limitations. This foundational knowledge would prepare them for creative problem-solving.

B. Defining Training for All Jobs

There would be a transformation of current processes and, with it, the corresponding training modules for users. Key Users play a pivotal role in redrafting the training modules.

C. Defining Training Quality Metrics

The end goal of digital systems may be to eliminate the need for intensive user training, but there will always be certain training required.

Key Users’ training should include How to:

- a) Define metrics to assess both the effectiveness of training and in performing the new roles.

- b) Identify gaps and suggest improvements iteratively.

D. Career Planning and Organizational Impact

Digital transformations can disrupt organizational structures and alter traditional career paths. Existing promises of promotions or transitions may no longer align with the new reality.

Key Users' training should include:

- a) Anticipate and surface these concerns early.
- b) Work closely with senior management and HR to manage expectations and smooth transitions.

E. Reskilling Programs for Existing Staff

New systems can create sea changes in workflows and responsibilities; or may even lead to job losses. Existing staff will often need significant retraining.

Key Users' training should include how to:

- a) Navigate and address behavioral and emotional responses to these changes.
- b) Serve as a first line of support and reassurance to affected colleagues.

They should be tactful in supporting affected employees and ensure their reskilling and redeployment.

Balancing Potential and Preparedness

While training can significantly enhance a Key User's readiness, it cannot substitute for intrinsic qualities like curiosity, resilience, and interpersonal skills. Therefore, while a Key User candidate may grow in technical capability through structured training, their foundational behavioral competencies must already be in place.

By investing in targeted, comprehensive training, organizations set their Key Users up for success, not just as participants in implementation, but as ongoing champions of digital transformation.

* * *

How do you verify whether the Key User has the minimum skills and knowledge to perform the tasks?

Performance appraisal is a systematic and periodic evaluation process aimed at assessing employee performance and identifying potential for further growth and development. Appraising a Key User's

performance can be tricky. Their role is more creative than transactional; it isn't measurable through straightforward metrics like revenue achieved, volume produced, cycle time, or processing accuracy.

While achieving project milestones and meeting deadlines is one indicator, these measures alone don't fully capture the efficiency or effectiveness of an individual's contribution.

Here is a method to Set Minimum Standards and Appraise Key User Performance:

1. Objective Setting

Break down overall project objectives into specific, periodic objectives for the Key User; perhaps quarterly or half-yearly. The objectives should detail expectations of timeliness and minimum output quality. Objectives should be dynamic, allowing refinement and recalibration as the project progresses.

2. Behavioral Rating Scales

Introduce a rating scale (e.g., 1 to 7) to assess key behavioral competencies aligned with the job description:

- (A) Interpersonal interactions
- (B) Inquisitiveness
- (C) Creativity
- (D) Energy and Enthusiasm
- (E) Confidence
- (F) Influencing ability
- (G) Emotional composure

Managers and peers can contribute to the rating process. Encourage Key Users to document their creative outputs and suggestions, which they can showcase during reviews.

3. Self-Assessment of Job Satisfaction

Creative workers are typically highly productive when they enjoy their work. Self-assessments of job satisfaction can reveal their motivation and likely effectiveness. While actual hours worked aren't always indicative, their active engagement and visible presence can serve as proxy indicators.

4. Team Performance Reviews

Periodic reviews of the entire implementation team's performance often highlight individual contributions (or gaps), offering natural, contextualized feedback on each Key User's role.

5. Dynamic Reporting Structures

Reorganizing reporting relationships during different project phases can help neutralize biases or entrenched loyalties. This may keep a check on both fears and favors.

6. Peer Reviews

Collect structured feedback from other Key Users, consultants, technology providers, and project team members. Their direct exposure to the Key User's work provides valuable ground-level insights.

7. External Evaluators

For long-running projects, consider deploying external evaluators to provide unbiased appraisals.

Note, however, that this can be expensive and, if overused, might undermine the original intent of empowering an internal champion as Key User.

8. Cost-Effectiveness Metrics

If a Key User has control over specific budget areas, include cost management and optimization as part of their performance metrics.

9. Trainee Feedback

Gather structured feedback from End-users who have undergone training conducted by the Key User. Their first-hand experience can offer insights into both content clarity and training effectiveness.

10. Post Go-Live Satisfaction Surveys

After implementation, conduct regular User Satisfaction Surveys.

Analyzing feedback can help:

- a) Identify improvement opportunities
- b) Suggest enhancements or new initiatives
- c) Offer additional data points for evaluating Key User performance.

Act on the Findings

Remember, it's never enough to measure the Key User's effectiveness alone. The key is to act on the insights gathered, whether by refining their objectives, offering targeted skill development, or

providing additional support. This not only helps the Key User grow but also boosts the overall effectiveness of the project.

* * *

Attrition and Absenteeism

As star performers within their respective functions, Key Users, regarded as Heroes by other End-users, may have enjoyed a strong, rewarding journey under the mentorship of their functional leaders. However, once they transition to the digital project team, especially in a full-time capacity, there's a risk that they may not achieve the same level of effectiveness as before.

If the project's management doesn't meet the Key User's expectations, whether in terms of leadership quality, clarity of direction, or team dynamics, Key Users may feel out of place or undervalued. In such situations, they might express a desire to return to their former functional roles. However, by this time, their function would have assigned their old positions to others. Even if reintegration is possible, there's a real risk that ex-teammates could perceive them as having "failed" to rise to the challenge of the new digital environment, compounding their sense of alienation.

Warning Signs to Watch For:

Project managers should stay alert to early signs of discontent, which might manifest as:

- 1) Unscheduled absences
- 2) Tardiness for meetings or delayed task completions
- 3) Reduced engagement - for example, becoming quieter or withdrawn in informal settings like coffee room discussions

Preventive and Responsive Measures:

- a) Regular Team-Building Exercises: Foster a strong, inclusive culture where Key Users feel valued and integrated within both the project team and their broader organizational network.
- b) Sensitive Leadership Adjustments: If the discontent appears linked to the behavior of a specific manager or team lead, the project steering committee should be prepared to adjust reporting lines or, where necessary, reassign personnel to restore a healthy working dynamic.

Impact of Attrition:

If the project manager misses the early warning signs and attrition occurs, the consequences can be significant:

- (i) Disruption to specific modules where the Key User played a pivotal role
- (ii) Negative impact on team morale
- (iii) Delays or quality issues affecting project timelines and overall outcomes
- (iv) As these Key Users are both functionally competent and technologically savvy, they become attractive targets for other organizations; especially once they showcase their digital skills.

Mitigation Strategy:

Recognizing that some attrition may be inevitable despite best efforts, it's prudent to:

- a) Identify backup resources; appoint more than one Key User (or at least have understudies) from each functional department
- b) Cross-train team members so that it builds redundancy and resilience within the project structure.

This approach ensures continuity and maintains project momentum, even if unexpected turnover occurs.

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